



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ATHLETES PARTICIPATING
IN THE INTERNATIONAL WATER-SKIING EVENT**

*Castel Gandolfo
Saturday, 14 September 1991*

Dear Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome members of the *Italian National Olympic Committee and the participants in the "Italian Masters - Memorial Marco Merlo" water-skiing event*. I thank Mr Aldo Franchi, President of the Italian Water-skiing Federation, for his kind words of introduction. I greet you all and wish you well in your championship.

The fact that you come from so many countries makes your gathering a magnificent occasion for meeting people of different backgrounds and for building friendships beyond all barriers of race, culture or political experience. You are united, first of all, in your sporting interest. You share a passion for the sport of water-skiing. It has become a dynamic source of communication and contact between you. Your sporting activities not only bring out certain qualities in each one of you individually. They not only impel you to give the best of yourselves physically and competitively; they also invite you constantly to reach out to discover the bonds that unite you with others. Indeed, sports are a uniquely effective means of building mutual esteem and respect, human solidarity, friendship and goodwill among peoples.

The Church values and respects sports which are truly worthy of the human person. They are such when they foster the orderly and harmonious development of the body at the service of the spirit, and when they constitute an intelligent and formative competition which stirs up interest and enthusiasm, and are a source of enjoyable relaxation. I encourage you to have this ideal always before you, so that your dedication to sport will be matched by a striving for the higher values which will give you dignity and moral stature in your own eyes and in the eyes of those who follow

your achievements.

The ancient Romans set great store by the educational value of sports and competitions. In the Christian tradition, the struggle for virtue and fidelity to Christ have often been presented under the metaphor of athletic competition. Saint Paul speaks of his life as a race in which it is vital to reach the final goal (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-27). It is my hope that your visit on this occasion will be an opportunity for you to commit yourselves once more to the highest ideals of human solidarity and to faithfulness in your relations with God, our Creator and Redeemer. May his abundant blessings be with you and your families.

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